

ON
TRACK
OFF
ROAD





Photo: Ray Archer



Team Rockstar Energy Husqvarna
Thomas Kjer-Olsen
Grand Prix of Latvia
MX2 Winner



www.ride100percent.com
[@ride100percent](https://www.instagram.com/ride100percent)







STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

With podiums in nine from ten races in MotoGP at Jerez Dani Pedrosa was always going to be in the reckoning for a third win at what was round four of the 2017 series. The thirty-one year old's immaculate series of lap-times for a 30th success in the class however was a different level to the pack

Photo by CormacGP



0 MX



A LITTLE TOO FAR...

A millimetre of throttle too far for Australian teenager Hunter Lawrence on the factory Suzuki during last week-end's MX2 class at the Grand Prix of Latvia. The Kegums circuit was once more a demanding test that ate further into the health and conditioning of the MXGP stars

Photo by Ray Archer





HUNTING & COLLECTING

Photo by Cudby/Shepherd

There is just something about this image that not only sums up perhaps the most exciting AMA Supercross series in recent memory but also a percentage of the theatrics that those lucky enough to be in Las Vegas last weekend will remember for some time. Tomac racked the numbers in 2017 but Dungey rang the school bell for championship proficiency. Don't miss Steve Matthes take on proceedings further in the magazine



**WE'VE CREATED
THE ARMOR.
BUT WE CAN'T FIGHT
ALL YOUR BATTLES.**

At least not the ones in your head.

Our all-new C-Frame Carbon PRO knee brace now slimmer, lighter and stronger.

Designed for peace of mind.

Go find it: leatt.com/2017-c-frame-pro/



LEATT

OVER TO YOU



MotoGP

RED BULL GRAND PRIX OF SPAIN

JEREZ · MAY 7th · Rnd 4 of 18

MotoGP winner: Dani Pedrosa, Honda

Moto2 winner: Alex Marquez, Kalex

Moto3 winner: Aron Canet, Honda



By Adam Wheeler
Blogs by David Emmett/Neil 'MorroGP' Morrison
Photos by CormacGP

DANCING TO HIS OWN RHYTHM



For the first European fixture of the season and the thirty-first Grand Prix that Jerez has hosted, the Andalusian venue threw up another bumper crowd, a climate that veered from copious warm rain on Friday morning to temperatures nudging thirty degrees by a sun-kissed Sunday afternoon. Red Bull sponsorship was prevalent and judging by the packed paddock a lust for racing was in full flow. Even Iggy Pop was attendance after playing a street gig in nearby La Puerta de Santa Maria Saturday night.

By the time the sky turned from blue to black Sunday evening and teams were still working on bikes for the Monday test – particularly those that were full of gravel – the range of emotion and incident from the weekend was already in perspective. From Repsol Honda's brilliance and Dani Pedrosa metronomic performance to Yamaha's malaise; to the extent that both Maverick Viñales and Valentino Rossi wore expressions of bemusement in their afternoon media debriefs. From a swell of frustration and even anger at Michelin's allegedly inconsistently performing rubber (Aleix Espargaro: 'I was struggling a lot with the front and it was a drama just to stay on the bike... we spend millions to lap slower than Spanish Superbike; it is unbelievable.') to costly but understandable actions – Alvaro Bautista driving Jack Miller to boiling point after scooting the Australian out of action

on Turn 1 and the FIM imposing a 1000 euro fine for the Marc VDS rider's push on the Spaniard. Crashed safety cars, ditched aerodynamic fairing concepts, world champions back in employment and hazardous wasps in leathers were other notions and occurrences flying around.



Emotions ran high for Alex Marquez and Aron Canet for maiden triumphs on arguably the best stage to do so while the compact, narrow and deceptive grip of the Jerez asphalt – particularly at turns 9 and 11 were the scourge of many a fairing.

As usual it was Rossi's tendency to offer a succinct summary of the meeting that served on Sunday. 'There are four riders within ten points but if you look from the first race then Viñales won two and we had two bikes on the podium and now Honda have done the same; it is like each race is a mini championship!'



MotoGP SPA







* A fortnight on from Austin and MotoGP was hostage to another factory Honda 1-2 and after Saturday's qualification when the RCV's filled the front row of the grid. In truth it was a remarkable turnaround from Rossi and Yamaha's domination twelve months previously and gave Pedrosa another small milestone in a twelve year career in the premier class as he scribbled a message on the commemorative board created for Grand Prix's 3000th race since 1949. The thirty-one year old was watched and partially guided by Sete Gibernau who provided some interesting scope on how #26 is looking to shake the classic 'bridesmaid' tag.

'I am not a coach; I am just a good friend and I am learning as much as he is,' the winner of nine GPs claimed but has clearly shared a lot of Pedrosa's headspace of late. 'I look at Dani and see a very positive guy now. I myself have crossed many periods [in a career] and I know what they can give you [low and high] but Dani is very strong. He has some way still to go but he took the challenge here today. The best of him is still to come.'

'It is easy to say and even harder to do but happiness should bring the win, not that a win should bring happiness.'

The Catalan also tested the RCV at a recent private outing for the Repsol crew. 'It was like no time had gone by! It was a nice gesture by Honda, it was fun and helped me understand some things. At one point it was strange because I was in the chair and Dani was asking me how it was!'



* Wheelspin issues affected #46 and pushed him back to tenth; not only chopping his championship lead down to two points but also representing his worst finish in the dry since his ill-fated term with Ducati. Rossi was also the subject of rumours regarding a move to establish a MotoGP team to dovetail with his Sky Racing VR46 outfits in Moto3 and Moto2 and cement a firm trajectory for the cream of the eleven rider Academy system he currently oversees.

The Italian was adamant on Friday that premier class team ownership was not on the horizon (at present). 'No, no; is not true,' he said. 'But was already last year [talk] like this. Carmelo [Ezpeleta] said to me he would be very happy if I have a team in MotoGP. I'm very happy too, so thanks to Carmelo! But at this moment it is not in our plan. Because we are not big enough, we don't have enough 'force'. Also our plan is to help the young Italian riders, so Moto3 and Moto2 is already enough. We don't have enough space!' Rossi was able to watch Pecco Bagnaia snare the Moto2 crew's first silverware on Sunday. Bagnaia and Franco Morbidelli are currently excelling from the Academy crop and would seem the most likely to find a route into MotoGP.





MotoGP SPA


REPSOL


Red Bull


REPSOL

One HEART.
Satu HATI.


REPSOL

HRC


REPSOL


Red Bull


REPSOL

One HEART.
Satu HATI.


REPSOL

HRC


REPSOL


Red Bull


REPSOL


HONDA


REPSOL


REPSOL


Red Bull

REPSOL
Estrella Galicia 0.0
Red Bull
Arai
HRC
HONDA
One HEART. Satu HATI.



* Again the Monster Yamaha Tech3 rider was a name on many lips after scoring his third top five result and personal best of fourth position to sit as top satellite team representative on Sunday. Zarco's speed and first lap proactivity is making #5 a very hot property in MotoGP. 'Because I feel good at the beginning of the race I just took that opportunity and today the factory guys were struggling. So thanks to that I got two better positions,' he modestly admitted. A first podium for France's most successful Grand Prix rider ever is just a matter of weeks and races; perhaps the roof could be raised around the variety of turns at Le Mans in two weeks?



* A 30th birthday drew up photos and memories of a stern looking Jorge Lorenzo waiting patiently for the second day of practice at the 2002 Grand Prix of Spain at Jerez so he'd reach his fifteenth celebration and being his world championship career. Three classes, five titles and 61 wins later (he is the fifth most successful GP rider ever) Lorenzo marked another milestone with his first Ducati podium and an effective wearing-down of the resilient Zarco in the dispute for third place. 'This is the best present,' he said after improving on a highest result of 9th from the opening three rounds. 'Some people doubted my riding and mentality too early and finally they have to take their words in their mouths; you cannot doubt any rider in this championship.'



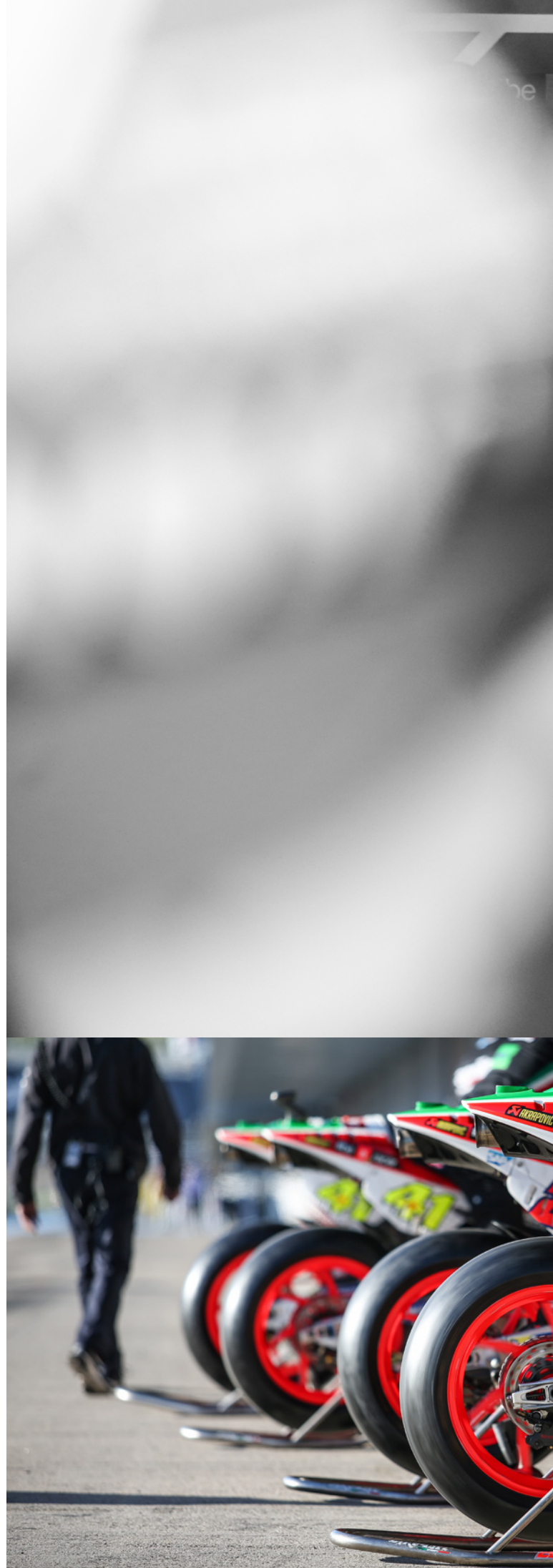
Excitement was palpable for KTM with lap-times in practice that saw Pol Espargaro troubling the top ten for the first time and for a positive first outing with the new engine boasting the revised firing order. Typically KTM were able to turnaround technical changes with immense speed. Sadly #44 destroyed the bike on the same corner as Cal Crutchlow in the race. Keep an eye on the orange though.





Sam Lowes came close to his first MotoGP points on the Aprilia. The return to Europe for the Brit felt more pronounced at Jerez; it was only twelve months previously that #22 had spectacularly slid his way to victory in Moto2. 'Obviously I want to be doing a better job than what I am, but it's not easy, MotoGP,' he assessed on Saturday after qualification. 'Aleix is doing a really good job, but it's not easy for him. He's crashing a lot, he's not winning. We're working hard and the potential's really high. I'm proud of myself for getting this far and I'll be more proud of myself when I can be successful in this class.' Lowes still seems to be refining his style to suit the RS-GP and it is a work in progress. The twenty-seven year old is one of the latest riders to adopt a thumb-operated rear brake. 'Not many riders – even in MotoGP – use the rear brake on lean angle in the right corners...because it is so hard to get to. I never used a rear brake until I rode a MotoGP bike and now I use it on every corner. I had been asking for it and we had it on one of my bikes in Austin and also in Le Mans and I felt really good and now it is natural for me to use it in the left corners also. Now I understand how it can help me and it feels natural.'

Perhaps more than any other rider on the MotoGP grid there is a feeling of more to come from Lowes and he indicated as much when comparing his current level in relation to the Moto2 mastery so evident in 2016. 'I watched a ten second clip on Twitter yesterday of me here on the last corner and sliding it in and I thought to myself 'how I was riding that bike so far off how I feel at the minute...' and that is actually really positive because in MotoGP you need to ride like that [to the limit] and my confidence is slowly coming. When I can be relaxed and really show what I can do then I know I will be good. It [Jerez 2016] does feel like a long time but I know I can do a good job and I know my potential. These things [MotoGP bikes] are very different to Moto2 bikes. I know I can do it...I just need to keep working.'





30 IS THE NEW 20...

There were signs of a Ducati turnaround on Saturday evening, when, speaking calmly and confidently, Jorge Lorenzo was unequivocal. When the question of whether this had been his best day in red since his much hyped move from Yamaha just over five months before, his answer was immediate. “Yes,” he said. “A worse position than Austin, but better feelings and closer to the top guys.”

The five-time world champion was right. His eighth place in qualifying was two better than last time out, but Lorenzo had been in competitive trim all weekend. That old swagger was back too, as he playfully threw put-downs in Andrea Iannone’s direction [“those who wait for other riders are normally not fighting for championships”] and spoke assuredly on his own performance.

That was in no doubt a day later too, when the relief etched across the faces of Ducati personnel standing below the podium was equal to the joy on Lorenzo’s. If the position was good, the gap to the winner – 14s (and Andrea Dovizioso eight seconds

and two places back as the next best Ducati) was even better. “One of my best podiums,” he proudly declared on Monday.

This was not just a personal milestone. Jerez was supposed to be a nightmare of a weekend for Ducati, a track that had yielded just four podiums since that roaring introduction to the premier class in 2003. The last time a red bike finished less than 25s behind first place came seven years before. Come Sunday, there was a definite sense that the worst of times were behind him. In Jerez, it felt as though Lorenzo, who turned 30 on Thursday, was finally justifying his costly fee. A ride of real class.

Perhaps it was naïve to build his hopes up for the first race at Qatar. 2017 was always going to be one of transition, with a fair share of chastening moments. One can only imagine the dismay felt by factory bosses at seeing their prized asset struggle to keep a two-year old Ducati behind in eleventh at the first race, then a rash first corner fall two weeks later in Argentina.

After Austin, sporting director Paolo Ciabatti felt the need to approach journalists – a sign of trouble if ever there was one – to share his thoughts. “It was worse than we expected,” he conceded. Yet in his public dealings, Lorenzo has never been overly downcast, choosing to speak articulately and honestly of his difficulties in adapting. In short, he always knew taming the Desmosedici’s reported 270-280bhp would be no walk in the park.

Along with loving the Jerez layout, the key to this performance was Lorenzo gaining more time on the bike. As he said post-race, the difference in Andalusia was

By Neil Morrison



“mainly kilometres.” A switch to a higher ride height, improving front feel, in Argentina was one step. Continuing to learn how to use the rear brake effectively to calm the fearsome Desmosedici on corner entry was another. But mainly it was gaining experience. “When I come to MotoGP in 2008 suddenly I was fast because the bike was made for my riding,” he explained. “But in other categories it took me a long time to understand certain things. With this bike the same [thing] is happening.”

Understanding the added power and different braking technique needed for the Ducati is one thing. Reacting to its sudden surge of power as he touches the throttle is another. But there is so much more than that. Lorenzo has had to learn the working methods of a new team. Then there is the working language. Saying one thing to Yamaha engineers could mean something completely different by those in the Bologna garage.

Crew chief Daniele Romagnoli has experience working in both Yamaha and Ducati boxes, after moving from the former to the latter with Cal Crutchlow in 2014. For him, the change was pronounced. “The differences are many. First of all it’s the mentality of the people behind the factory,” he said. It’s a very different philosophy. One is Asian. The other is European. For example, to make things simple, the Japanese are the best. The bike is simple. The Yamaha historically has a good chassis. Handling, corner speed is the first point for them. For Ducati it’s more orientated around the speed of the engine.”

A roll call of former riders to make the Yamaha-Ducati switch always needed time. The Desmosedici is certainly a stronger bike than before 2014, but Valentino Rossi, Dovizioso and Crutchlow all needed time to adapt. “Many riders came from Yamaha,” says Romagnoli, who worked with Lorenzo at Yamaha in ‘08-‘09. “When they joined Ducati it was a shock. You can’t change your riding style in a short time. I can understand

Lorenzo, a little pressure he feels. He’s a world champion and can’t wait. He’s a rider that wants things in a short time. Cal said the same thing. After three or four races he said, ‘I don’t think this bike will be good for me.’ But by the end of the season he found a way. You must be more patient.”

And what’s telling is Lorenzo still isn’t riding naturally. “[It] Flowed more [at Jerez] but still I think a little bit,” he said post-race. “It’s not natural for me to use still the rear brake, but every practice that I do I feel more natural.” When this clicks, the Majorcan will be even closer to the front.

With Maverick Viñales, his Yamaha replacement, dominant at races one and two, it was almost painful to watch a rider of Lorenzo’s ability attempting to sound content with a day during which he was outside the top ten. If he can do this at Jerez, further podiums and, with Austria getting closer, even more may lie ahead. Ducati’s faith is justified.



MotoGP SPA



GETTING STUCK ON THE STICKY...

If there is one thing that determined the outcome of the MotoGP race at Jerez it is surely grip. The stickiness of the Andalusian asphalt, and the way it changed in the heat of the afternoon, proved to be a determining factor in the race. Nobody had grip there, the track has not been resurfaced for 14 years, and the afternoon temperatures transformed it to an ice rink. How the different bikes and riders dealt with that made the difference between victory and defeat. And boy, were there a few defeats on Sunday.

The first sign that there was something strange going on at Jerez was when FIM Safety Officer and former 500cc world champion Franco Uncini stuck the BMW safety car into the wall on the exit of Turn 5, the fast right hander leading on to the back straight. Now, the news that a current or former motorcycle racer has managed to crash a fast car is about as surprising as learning that the Bishop of Rome has a keen interest in the Catholic creed, yet Uncini's record in the safety car is fairly impeccable. For the Italian to lose control of the car and hit a barrier is unheard of. Especially when the car also contains a guest, along for the ride. Observers remarked that it had been a rather strange crash.

Yes, Uncini had been traveling at speed, as he always does when circulating in the safety car. But the movement the car had made had been a surprise. It was the first inkling that there might be something amiss with the grip at the track.

The race played out as an object lesson in using available grip. The Hondas had it, and won, Dani Pedrosa reigning imperious at a track he loves. The Yamahas needed it, but had none, and finished well down the order. Except for Johann Zarco, who had found front grip with the medium front, and rode an exceptional race to fourth place. The Ducatis were somewhere in the middle, and Jorge Lorenzo put the Desmosedici

on the podium at one of his favourite circuits, while Andrea Dovizioso had his best race on a Ducati at Jerez.

What caused the variation? Grip in motorcycle racing is a peculiar and complex thing, yet it is the defining factor in the sport. The friction created between the two tyres and the track determines exactly where a rider finishes. Friction is referred to as traction when applied to the rear wheel, where power from the engine is converted to speed on the ground, and to grip when applied to the front wheel, where steering forces try to divert the direction the motorcycle is traveling in, to get it round the corner, and on to the next one. Grip is the be-all and

By David Emmett



end-all in racing, the holy grail each team and rider are chasing.

There are two elements to grip: the compound of the tyre rubber, and the friction coefficient or abrasiveness of a track surface. Or rather, there is just one element: the complex interaction between those two factors. Every other part of a motorcycle is designed around those elements: chassis design is aimed at maximizing the interaction; tyre profile and carcass construction at optimizing it under varying loads, such as braking, cornering, or acceleration; suspension and bike setup is used to find the best compromise under all circumstances on the bike; rider input (braking, acceleration, the endless shifting of bodyweight in search of traction) aimed at finding and understanding the limits of grip.

There are complicating factors too, especially at a track like Jerez, which probably has the lowest grip of all the circuits on the calendar. Jerez changes radically in the heat, giving lots of grip when track temperatures

are under 30°C, grip dropping off drastically when they rise above 41°C. Then there's the fact that each class leaves a layer of rubber on the track, affecting the category which comes after them. The featherweight Moto3 bikes and their skinny tires barely mark the surface, while Moto2 and MotoGP have more horsepower, more weight, and fatter tires to smear their rubber all over the circuit.

'GRIP IN MOTORCYCLE RACING IS A PECULIAR AND COMPLEX THING, YET IT IS THE DEFINING FACTOR IN THE SPORT.'

Almost every Sunday, MotoGP riders complain how the track changes when racing after Moto2. They practice after Moto3, which barely affects them, then in the race, the track feels totally different. Rookie Jonas Folger noticed this for the first time at the Jerez race. 'I felt it really the first time after Jerez. I remember when I was in Moto2, and we always had practice after MotoGP, always the first five or six laps, you could make the fastest lap time,

because you still had the rubber from the MotoGP. After you put the the Moto2 rubber back, then the grip was getting less again.'

This, then, perhaps explains some upsets and surprises at Jerez. The Hondas found grip, and won. Maverick Viñales struggled with his front tyre and finished sixth. Valentino Rossi gambled and lost on a setting to find rear grip, ending in tenth. At other tracks, where grip is less extreme, the results will be different, or even reversed. But in the end, grip will always determine the outcome.



KTM 1290 SUPER DUKE R **PURE, RAW** AND PROUDLY EXCESSIVE

Let the new LED headlight guide you as you embrace a hell of a ride on this heavenly creature. Packed with gut-wrenching performance and equally evil looks, this BEAST 2.0 clearly isn't for the faint of heart. If you think you've got what it takes, challenge yourself to see what real power and precision can feel like.

BEAST 2.0



READY TO RACE
» www.ktm.com



Photo: R. Schell

KTM



monster energy

Another high-profile signature drink by the beverage brand that have poured their product into top-level motorsports and watched it seep far and wide for almost a decade. The Valentino Rossi Monster Energy can cannot be missed on shop shelves and now the American firm have arguably the most high-profile driver launching his own '44' refreshment. Initially set to cover European markets the Lewis Hamilton drink follows the Rossi template in that the athlete had full involvement in the product and the project extends beyond a mere endorsement. No verdict yet on the flavour and taste (Rossi's is pleasantly citrus) but the former world champion himself provided a quote on the can launch announcement that gives a pretty good guide. "We talked through the flavours I was into and Monster interpreted this perfectly first shot. This was the first blend I tasted. I loved it immediately," the Mercedes driver said. "Candy Red is a color that is present in every aspect of my life. It's a great bold color, and the design is inspired by the stripes on my race helmet. I have been connected with Monster for five years now, and I've always wanted my own drink. So for me it is a dream come true. I'm really excited to have worked through every detail of the product from scratch, and finally see '44' hit the shelves."

Considering the hefty reach of Monster expect the '44' to be quickly seen alongside standard green and sugar-free blue editions pretty soon.



www.monsterenergy.com



16-1 ZACH OSE

DEFIES THE ODDS
2017 LITES EAST CHAMPION



OSBORNE



A huge congratulations goes out to Zach Osborne, his family, team and fellow sponsors. The entire Fly Racing team is proud of your achievement and your never-give-up spirit.

Way to go, Zach!



AMA-SX

LAS VEGAS

SAM BOYD STADIUM · APRIL 22nd · Rnd 17

450SX winner: Jason Anderson, Husqvarna

250SX West/East winner: Adam Cianciarulo, Kawasaki

By Steve Matthes
Photos by Simon Cudby/Rich Shepherd

WAR WON



SUPERCROSS LAS VEGAS



That's a wrap on the 2017 Monster Energy Supercross series and man, if Feld Motorsports (the promoters) could just order up a copy of this year to market and sell, they'd see a boom in the sport's popularity. What drama we've had as Monster Energy Kawasaki's Eli Tomac tried to fight back from his early season deficit (and bike issue in Dallas) to take the title. Red Bull KTM's Ryan Dungey was aiming for his third gong in a row and had re-taken the points lead last week in New York when Tomac fell while leading and then teammate Marvin Musquin let him by for the win. The race in the MetLife Stadium was as sensational as they come...until we hit this weekend!

Tomac's only hope was to win and hope Dungey finished fifth or lower. Considering that Dungey hadn't finished fifth or worse in approximately fifteen years that was a tough ask. So Tomac had to try and make something - anything - happen and he did just that after aggressively passing Dungey for the lead early on. Tomac slowed to try and 'bunch' the field up and maybe, just maybe someone else gets in the way or Dungey goes down. So Tomac slowed up, let Dungey by a couple of times and then again 'aggressively' passed him. It was seat-squirming stuff.

There's such a fine line between being aggressive and dirty and Tomac, in my opinion, danced right there. He didn't knock Dungey down but he did a fine job of trying to! Dungey called them 'cheap shots' after the race but changed his tact in the press conference afterwards. Meanwhile while the top two were going at it, Rockstar Husqvarna's Jason Anderson, Monster Yamaha's Chad Reed, Tomac's teammate Josh Grant were catching up and forcing themselves into the mix. Tomac's plan, incredibly, might have almost worked!

'For one, I never want to injure the person. At the same time, there's a whole lot on the line. It's the championship,' Tomac told me afterwards. "It's what we dream of when we're kids. We were that close this year. That race, it was something else. It was a dream scenario for me to be in front and to be able to stack up the pack and control it and hopefully bunch up guys.'

'It actually was working at a point. At the end, it didn't. Did all we could. Laid everything out there and that was it.'

Yes Eli, it came so close to working out so perfectly.



So we know that Anderson took the win (after hitting Reed pretty good right after the #22 had gotten by), Tomac second and Dungey's fourth secured the title. Those three points from last week that were gifted to Dungey didn't end up coming into play but man, what a night.

I get what Tomac was trying to do but I'm not sure, if successful, what the Kawasaki guys thought would happen. Like, say Tomac knocks Dungey down on the second, third or maybe fourth attempt after letting him by and goes on to win the title. We've seen retaliation attempts by Reed on Honda's Trey Canard years ago get a black flag, Josh Hansen got black flagged for knocking a rider down, we've seen penalties for rough riding all the time. If you're letting a rider by you then going in for the kill (and even



though Tomac's attempts were just hard riding and not dirty, the repeated intent was clear: knock the rider off his bike) multiple times and it works, is that something that KTM will just stand by and go: 'Oh ok, that sucks we lost the title...onto the outdoors!' Uh, no right? The FIM would have a complete shit show on their hands and I understand you let the first attempt go as that's passing into the lead but after that? I can't see the FIM letting Tomac's move stand. In a way, I'm glad it didn't come to that and we'd all have to wait to see who the supercross champ was. I did chuckle at Eli's comment to me about the moves: 'I gave him good bumps. I literally blew him off the track. At the same time, you never want to actually hurt someone like that. I did all I could do, and Ryan held it together.' Yes, you did give him some good bumps Eli!

If it's me, I take a shot at Dungey when I pass and then take off for the win and hope that stuff happens. Grant and Reed were riding well but then again so was Anderson and KTM's Blake Baggett before he fell. I don't know, I get the strategy but can't see how there wouldn't be a penalty. As it stands now, Tomac's nine wins in a season ties Damon Bradshaw for most in a series without winning a championship and Dungey's three wins were the third fewest in supercross history (with the title obtained).

Chad Reed has come back to social media after a hiatus and after his eventful 450SX main event he posted a photo of his butt patch saying 'that's all folks' and nothing else leading some to speculate that was it for his career. I have to admit, I was confused also but I ran into Reed later on back at the hotel after the race and he said that was not a retirement message but he doesn't have a ride for 2018. I know he's in talks with some teams for next year and I know he wasn't thrilled with his Yamaha this year. Guess we'll know soon enough but look for CR22 to be out there in 2018.

Josh Grant got his first podium in years and capped off a pretty successful season under the Monster Kawasaki tent. Grant's on a one year deal with the team but I'd look for him to be back with them next year despite 250SX West winner Justin Hill saying he wants to go to a 450 for next year. I would think Kawasaki would keep Grant one more year, give Hill a raise and let him run the number 1 plate.

Anderson got the win and ended his season with four straight podiums including the top spot in Vegas. The #21 hasn't been quite the same story as he was last year but he salvaged the season with some great rides at the end. His battle with Reed in the Vegas main was pretty epic. Look for his new deal with Husqvarna to be announced real soon.

Marvin Musquin didn't finish the main event in Las Vegas after crashing in the whoops and jacking up his bike but he had a very successful season indoors. Marv's goal for 2018 is to get better in the whoops that claimed him in Vegas. Musquin's penchant for jumping through the whoops whenever they're hard packed does cost him some time. Still, he's "a guy" for the title in 2018 and despite the poor ending, Musquin was a revelation this year.



SUPERCROSS LAS VEGAS











PHEW...

Just an insane night in Las Vegas for the 250SX East/West Shootout. The format was changed a couple of years ago to get rid of the Shootout as a non-points paying event and it went to separate East/West mains and a Shootout. That didn't work well either so now we're back to just a shootout combining both classes into one and points being paid out. It certainly thrusts the entire series into chaos and made for an exciting night...perhaps one of the best main events this reporter has ever seen...

The 250SX West was already won. Monster Pro Circuit's Justin Hill had his first title wrapped up and there was no pressure on him. The East coast guys though had TLD's KTM's Jordon Smith holding the lead with Rockstar Husqvarna's Zach Osborne and Hill's teammate Joey Savatgy one point behind.

We all know what happened, Osborne went down in the first turn and got up dead last by a big amount. Smith had it and crashed out hard. Savatgy had everything looking great on his end and whatever it was, pressure or nerves (or maybe pressure and nerves?) he melted down on the track in front of us and dropped back far enough that Osborne, from dead last, made an aggressive pass with one turn to go to take the title. It was an amazing race that anything-and-everything a fan could possibly want.

In this day and age of changing TV habits, cord cutting, people wanting their information in 15 second video and 140 characters,

all sports - including small niche ones that we all love like super-cross/motocross - have to realize that they're in the entertainment business as well as the sports business. What the founding fathers did in the sport needs to be minded but not adhered to. The race in Las Vegas that left many teams' VIPs furious was exactly what was needed.

Changing the format to ensure drama like we saw was a great idea, in fact I'd do it one or two more times in 2018 at the centrally located races like Dallas and Houston. I heard plenty of crying about the format for the riders in the title hunt from the teams and how a west coast rider could "sacrifice" themselves for their eastern teammate and that would ruin the race, etc, etc. To that I say: boo hoo.

We've got to sell the sport, we've got to get eyeballs on it however we can. We don't want to turn into wrestling and rig things but there can be formats made that ensure a chance at seeing high drama and great racing every

By Steve Matthes



weekend. What the teams think about things is almost, I say 'almost', secondary. I've seen it time and time again: they're mostly unable to look past their own interests and the past. Why is that? Well because their jobs depend on riders performing and any change that hurts is bad and also because many of the people in charge of teams have been in the sport for so long, they're unable to wrap their heads around anything that might dilute the purity.

The racing in Las Vegas this weekend wasn't something that you can duplicate every time out but it was in many ways and one of the biggest reasons was because the format allowed for it.

Let's all remember, this is supposed to be fun and exciting. We need to work on making sure it stays like that.



leatt

www.leatt.com

We've highlighted Leatt's braces and GPX helmets recently but it is worth having another look at their 4.5 and 5.5 2017 riding gear that has considerable merits. The 4.5 comes in Lite, X-Flow and Windblock versions, all with respective roles. The X-Flow boasts a super-ventilated construction with the Windblock providing a contrast. The 5.5 Ultraweld is high level premium kit.

We were sent some of the 4.5 Lite and the while the citrus Lemon colouring is a little 'out there' for our taste (Leatt can only improve and explore new ground with their liveries and designs) the lightweight and stretchiness of the fabric is the first positive impression out of the box. Of the Ultraweld, Leatt state: 'It is made of four-way stretch mesh fabric that is Moisture-Cool wicking and has air channels. Its tape-bonded seams offer a superior level of comfort and its comfortable athletic stretch fit allows you to wear the jersey with or without your body armor and neck brace. Its silicone tail easily connects to the Leatt off-road pants and its bar task stitching offers critical reinforcement whilst the brush guard fabric over the elbows offer added protection as it is an ultra-thin flex film that is feather-light and increases scratch and abrasion resistance properties of the material.'

The Armourgel additions to the range of gloves are also beneficial factors to make Leatt one of the more alternative and forward-thinking players in the apparel market.





0 FEATURE



A large, conical pile of brown dirt dominates the foreground, showing deep, parallel tracks from a vehicle. In the upper right corner, a green metal structure, possibly a gate or part of a track, is visible against a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

UNLIKELY ALLIANCE

By Adam Wheeler, Photos by Ray Archer

While the international motocross community were awaiting details on the alleged growth and expansion of supercross, the news that Youthstream and MX Sports had formed a union to bolster the stuttering U.S. Grand Prix was a move from the outskirts of the leftfield. The powers behind MXGP and the Lucas Oil Pro Motocross series allying for the first time after years of mistrust, indifference and some public barb-chucking represented something of a milestone for motocross and the potential for a new dawn on how the sport is perceived

The story of how the two biggest promoters of the sport joined together is based on an event that initially drove a thicker wedge between the companies: the U.S. Grand Prix. Youthstream were naturally ambitious to explore and attract the vast North American market and the large wads of the industry that is based between the coasts. The controllers of MXGP since 2004 (and formerly as Action Group prior to the sale to Dorna Sports in 2000) courted curious parties like Charlotte Motor Speedway, nurtured a relationship with influential circuit owners like Glen Helen's Bud Feldkamp, ventured the Motocross of Nations with hopeful clubs and individuals at Budds Creek and Thunder Valley and generally operated on American soil with barely a passing acknowledgement to the national federation and promoters such as the Coombs family, who, as MX Sports, were making rapid moves to both stabilise and then prosper a national series that was falling deeper into the shadow of Supercross.

The Americans vaunted their tracks, climate, all-encompassing-motocross lifestyle and allure on the back of supercross to entice some of the cream of Grand Prix (Roczen, Pourcel, Musquin to name just three) and the pedigree and competitiveness of both championships was a bench-racing topic so ingrained that it was practically part of the woodwork. It was a complicated dynamic of rivalry that involved aspects such as calendar, salaries, machinery, tracks, prestige and career longevity. Slightings were commonplace and compliments were few and far between. A political shift also created ripples that lasted for several years and Davey Coombs and Youthstream President Giuseppe Luongo were the visible faces

and leaders of two groups in dispute. 'We would always find ourselves in conflict over whose series was better, who had the support, where the top riders were going to go and all that and it became really enhanced when the AMA decided to sell off the motocross series and all the other disciplines,' recounts Coombs. 'They invited Youthstream to participate in that process and it became a real bloodletting. People online did not make it any better and I'll admit that I was in there sometimes giving my two cents. In the end I think motocross in America is where it is always supposed to be and motocross in Europe has certainly grown exponentially with some of the things Giuseppe has done.'

'Giuseppe and I go way-back,' the journalist and RacerX mogul continues. 'He ran the famous '86 Nations at Maggiora and a year later my Dad got sick and I actually ran the U.S. GP at Delmont, Pennsylvania! So we have been rising up alongside one another. My role and work in America has been very different to what Giuseppe has done. We still have a history that you cannot really erase but there is fresh air. This is finally a chance to work together.'

Glen Helen in San Bernardino, California is one of U.S. racing's classic venues and hosted MXGP in 2009 and 2010 only to founder with a lack of attendance and participation from overloaded AMA supercross and motocross teams already inundated with fixtures standing at 29 and rising to 30 with the establishment of the Monster Energy Cup in 2011. Another attempt was made in 2015 and 2016 at the same track with barely marginal gains. Last year Grand Prix made two American stops with a well-organised and alternative meeting at the Charlotte Mo-

tor Speedway that drew the riders and a crowd but was still a relative blip on the organisation's agenda with their Drag Racing and other activities.

Exhausting options by trying tracks old and new, leaning on sponsors' encouragement through KTM and Monster Energy and even different regions of the country, the future of the Grand Prix depended on stoking an old relationship that had cooled somewhat. 'Giuseppe called me after the demise of the Glen Helen event last September and basically said they wanted a successful race in America and wanted to work with us for one single, good U.S event and to make an agreement together rather than working apart,' Coombs explains. 'We talked about old differences and how we both envisaged the race to be and we decided that we'd support it, which is something we haven't really done in the past and [they] have never really come through the front door; a U.S. GP announcement would just pop up! We suggested having one race immediately after the end of our domestic championship – Lucas Oil Pro Motocross – and we would do our best to find the right facility, work with the U.S. based distributors and riders and teams to recruit them and then work together next year on the Motocross of Nations.'

'That doesn't seem like a lot' he says, 'but if you think about where we were ten years ago when the AMA were selling off AMA Pro Racing then it is a much different situation. I have always been a fan of FIM World Championships and MXGP and it is nice to finally work on an event. I credit Giuseppe for picking up the phone and extending that olive branch and for what it is worth







USGP: THE RISE

the guy who told him he should do it is Roger De Coster [Red Bull KTM Team Principal] and Roger is obviously a very powerful and influential guy over here. Like everyone, he wanted to see a round of the world championship here in America but he didn't want to see two-three or four. We became comfortable with it and said 'let's go find a track'.

At the heart of the movement was another Luongo. Giuseppe's son, 29 year old David – a former professional footballer in France and Scotland and now semi-steering Youthstream after five years rising up and working behind-the-scenes (see separate interview) – is Vice President and Head of Operations and flew with CEO Daniele Rizzi to Daytona to clasp hands and back up words with actions. 'It was a tough moment [between the firms] from 2000-2010-'12 and now for a couple of years we have been coming a little closer together,' he says. 'For sure I'm bringing new blood and representing a new generation and it is a good opportunity to sit down and talk again. I had a really good feeling with Davey and Carrie Coombs. I said 'we're a small sport: we're fighting each other for what exactly? You are a national championship we are a world championship, you are the best market for motocross in the world but we represent the world championship...so it would be great to have an event in the USA that would present MXGP. When we fight together we fight against motocross and when we are together then we fight against other sports...' This was the basis of us sitting together to find a solution.'

'When I went to Daytona I met them,' he adds. 'I'd seen Davey before a few times but never really to talk properly. We had

three days together in Florida and I won't say it will be easy to succeed in the US but we cannot have a better partner. Nobody knows the market better than them and they can advise us on the tracks and the way to do it. So we will follow their way because we want it to succeed; I think many people who like or know MXGP would like a good round in the USA. We will never make a series there because we have to be logical with our project. MXGP is the world championship so we need a round in the USA but also Argentina, Mexico, Japan one day.'

'We have the chance to build the Grand Prix in a real American style with amateur races,' he affirms. 'It will be a nice event...but then some things you cannot control and will the timing be right? I don't know but I am sure that this feels good and it was time to give it a go.'

series, the material and set-up. We hope that MX Sports will also help us with the promotion of the event in the USA. They know their market and how it works... and we'll bring the series.'

Coombs: 'Ultimately the promoter is the track owner Wyn Kern and the series producer is Youthstream but we will help as much as we can to make it work. We're bringing our officials and loan our equipment and trucks and come down and really push.'

Gatorback was slotted into place swiftly after the cancellation of the Charlotte fixture in February. Renowned promoter Eric Peronnard had engineered one of the most curious and successful American MXGPs with the company in North Carolina – in spite of the fringe effects of Hurricane Hermine last September -

"I HAVE TO SAY THAT THE TRACK AT GATORBACK IS GOOD. IN FACT IT IS GREAT. IT HAS A BIT OF ELEVATION AND FEELS 'AMERICAN'. IT IS NOT FAR FROM ORLANDO AND SOME 20KM FROM GAINSVILLE. WE WANT THIS EVENT TO REALLY HAVE SOME U.S. IDENTITY INSIDE IT AND WILL WORK WITH THE GUYS TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN."

With backs slapped, trust in place and an agreement fixed, there remained clarification – at least publicly - as to 'who will be doing what' come the hurriedly slated seventeenth round of nineteenth at Gatorback Cycle Park northwest of Gainesville, Florida on September 2-3rd. 'So we have Youthstream, MX Sports and the circuit, and MX Sports will be the consultant to make everything work well,' Luongo outlines. 'They will give us advice and take care of many things specific to the U.S. market and we will bring the

but the bridge-building with MX Sports allowed Youthstream a new path. 'I have to thank Eric because he made a great job in Charlotte and so far it was the best event we've had in the USA despite the hurricane! It was a good race,' Luongo states. 'I feel the bigger the group, the better the possibilities. We will do our best to make sure this event has even more riders but it is also too early to say because you could have injuries and other things happen.'

Ensuring local participation from American teams and athletes has been identified as one of the key ingredients to making the 'numbers tally', and this is where MX Sports could prove invaluable in the persuasion of notching up the frantic race calendar for AMA crews. 'If we can help get the participation and a solid event going then it could grow into something special,' says Coombs. 'I grew up when Carlsbad was the home of the U.S. GP and Gavin Trippe was the promoter and it was a stunning success every year but then Supercross came along and changed all that because more and more U.S. riders didn't want to do that extra race and you kinda understood because it was in the middle of June and the same went for Unadilla and the 250 GP. So we thought putting it at the end [of the outdoors] and just a couple of weeks before the Des Nations it would inspire our top riders to come along and stay in shape. I think it has always affected us [Team USA] that our series finishes in August and the Nations is at the end of September. Even Roger [De Coster] said it would be helpful for the team.'

'I think there is a lot of people here that want to see the best AMA riders compete on the world stage and the OEMS and U.S. distributors want that to...but they don't want to do it four times and that's what we were facing just a few years ago,' he goes on. 'They did not want to be told from their bosses in Japan or Austria they would have to do all those extra races because the budgets for those teams are all based on the domestic market. Even adding one, two or three extra dates can be very problematic when we already have 29 races and then some. When I had my meeting with the OEMs in California early last winter - when Giuseppe and I came up with this agreement - we



asked if they would like to see one U.S. GP right after the Nationals and we had six 'yes' votes. They are looking forward to that...we can build a 'rider cup' type feeling because both series will be done – or almost – and all the riders will be at the top of their games; it could turn into something really big. We have to take small steps and make sure that there's enough demand but if everybody comes who says they will then we'll have a heluva race. I'll keep my fingers crossed.'

The relocation of MXGP to Florida could also be a factor in drawing a bigger audience. It would mean the first Grand Prix on the eastern side of the country and after attempts at Unadilla (New York) and Budds Creek (Maryland). 'One thing that will help this event work is the fact that there is no other big racing down in that part of the country [Florida] other than the Daytona Supercross,' opines Coombs. 'Glen Helen is obviously a global destination for everyone but people go there so often I think it was difficult to draw a crowd in September when the NFL season has started and they've been through a whole season of events.'

'Gatorback has been hoping to get back on the National schedule for twenty years, is located around all the riders [training camps] and finally they have an event that is the calibre of a National. There is a lot of energy and a lot of people interested in how this is going to go.'

With only six months to kickstart organisation, promotion and prep, it will be a fascinating to see how MX Sports and Youthstream initially gel to orientate the show in a satisfactory direction. 'This comes back to what I was saying

before about being a family company,' remarked Luongo. 'We don't belong to a founder, a bank or a fund. We try to do what we think is best for the sport. We are not a huge company but we can talk directly between us and decided on a line and follow it; we don't have to follow a direction for the stock market but rather what we think is good for the sport and MX Sports have the same principals because they are also family run. So when you can talk directly like that then you're able to put everything on the table and be clear. For the moment there is nothing but a positive feeling. We know where we are good and we know where they are good. We will use all their comments to make a good event.'

'I have gone to a lot of events in Europe and internationally and RacerX never



stopped covering the GPs,' advocates Coombs. 'I have always been enthusiastic about these events and I think I know them quite well now. I think we are pretty set with the way we do things as well but we both agreed that we could learn a lot from each other and hopefully that will help motocross grow. There will be some points where we won't get our way, and then also where we'll say 'we think this is a better idea...' and we expect that from Youthstream as well. In the end if we put the racing first and the success of the event – which we have done so far and from the very beginning of this – I don't anticipate any big obstacles.'

'I think we have a real level of collaboration now and there is nothing like 'we know this better than you'. Not at all. This is not the good way,' states Luongo.

In some ways the amalgamation of forces is also a meeting of the 'Davids'. 'David kinda came along and was in the middle and was really helpful,' offers Coombs. 'It is much different vibe and I see eye-to-eye with him as he comes from a soccer background and a sport that has a different type of enthusiasm for an event compared to his father. David is like a sports businessman and not just a motocross fan; that's something that is needed when you have people like myself and Giuseppe who are both essentially motocross fans. I have my sister to ground me, slow me down and think things through and David plays that role with his Dad. It has worked out well for both of us.'

There is little escaping the genial vibe around the pact and the possible effects have been felt wider. 'I have nothing but



praise for the two coming together and quietly in the background I have been trying to encourage something for quite some time, speaking with the AMA and ironing out the ruff,' says FIM CMS President Tony Skillington. 'The Grand Prix in Glen Helen had sporting success but no public success and hardly any financial success. So [the goal] to be working closely with the Coombs family and MX Sports is a very healthy sign. I return to the States soon for a meeting with Feld and the AMA to do with Supercross and on my way back I will be flying via Ohio to have a chat with the AMA about more details on how we see how all of this is working. I hope people see it for what it is and I think it's a huge occasion. Any time you can put [riders] from the two series together then it is the best-of-the-best and speaking as a fan that is excellent to witness.'

The subject of supercross lingers like an uncomfortable elephant in the corner. Carrying the kind of clout and reach that make the series easily the second best-watched motorcycle competition in the world, it is understandably lofty in the pecking order for all those associated and in play. Running seventeen rounds from January to May over eighteen weekends means a sizeable commitment. Incessant rumours of more races (even internationally) places more scrutiny on the priorities and limits for the participants and thus directly influences motocross. Youthstream and MX Sports may represent a combined united front for the discipline of motocross but whether this will carry any political weight remains to be seen. David Luongo was adamant on Youthstream's pitch on the landscape. 'We don't enter the American politics at all,' he said.



'For us it is just about bringing MXGP higher. We have a great relationship with Feld and with Davey, so it is not something on the table for us. We already have many issues to address with our championship that we won't enter into something like this! What happens in the USA is between those groups but I'm happy we have those good relationships.'

MXGP influence aside, Coombs stresses that the relationship and cordial agreement with supercross for the 'Outdoors' is still intact. 'It is productive and I have been producing the yearbook for what is now Feld Motorsports for almost twenty years now,' he said when asked to comment. 'We set up at each supercross and talk about each rule with Todd Jendro [Feld VP of Operations, two wheel division] and Dave Prater [Director of Supercross] and we do our best to streamline

things for the teams to make it possible to do that full seventeen race supercross series and transition into motocross.'

'I don't want that to change and I don't see a reason for it to,' he adds. 'I know there has been a lot of talk about possibly expanding the supercross schedule...my personal opinion is that we have enough races as it is and we should focus on the ones that we have because whether it is Anaheim or the IronMan National at the end of the season I think every event can use a little improvement. Only when we totally fill all the stadiums and pack all the tracks should we then talk about adding more events. Right now I think everyone is tapped out.'

The USGP is primed for resuscitation and such was the sense of optimism over the 'recent surgery' that the sport's flagship annual meeting quickly came into the frame. The Motocross of Nations was staged in America in 2007 and 2010 and were positively received but left a sticky financial aftermath that meant return trips to Colorado and Maryland were unlikely. 'What I said during the Daytona visit is that we'll bring the Nations to the U.S. in 2018 and so now we are still in discussion for the location and the details but we have a very good chance to go to one of the best places. There are good signs,' Luongo teased.

The MXoN could be leveraged onto the first re-laid foundations of the Grand Prix, but the close proximity of the AMA Pro Motocross series and MXGP creates an even more tantalising prospect: the chance of Grand Prix and 'Outdoors'



combining on the same date and even within the same motos. It is an idea long whispered in paddocks and even championed by the likes of Monster Energy Pro Circuit Kawasaki supremo Mitch Payton (a fan of Grand Prix and a regular 'looter' of international talent for the AMA scene). Asking Davey, David and the FIM for their opinions drew some guarded but enthusiastic responses. With the USGP firing up the engine, the Nations could see their work together hit a higher gear while a GP-National would be the equivalent of ultimate performance. 'I know! This is the dream...but there are many technical obstacles to make it happen; different sponsors and regulations,' Luongo claims. 'It could be an idea to develop and we can never-say-never but it won't be easy to make it. I have to say that a race like that – at the end of the both series' – would be like a 'celebration of racing' but to make it happen is not a question or topic right now. Our dream would be to have an American MXGP round of the USA with twenty GP riders and twenty AMA riders in the gate. I think the fans – and of course us – would love to see that. We want to get as close as possible to that dream.'

'Well, who wouldn't be absolutely tantalised by the idea of having that combined National/GP,' Coombs reacts. 'I get that...but I also get that Red Bull won't want to banner half the track with Monster and Fox Racing will not want to get ready with Fly and so on. I remember Eric Geboers approached me one time and said: 'what if we do a National and a GP at Namur with half the track looking like a national and half like a GP and the sponsors would be even?' I loved the idea but I don't know how that would work in a contract and whether it is what

the sponsors of each respective series want or what the teams would think. If we could work it out and get everyone to agree I'd immediately raise my hand and say 'let's do it'. There are a lot of 'moving pieces' but I would never rule it out. The Nations is very much about national pride and a celebration of international motocross but there is room for some sort of Cup event with the twenty best AMA and GP riders together. My god, it would be the biggest race of all. If someone could show me a road map to get there then count me in.'

There are practical difficulties with the rulebook. MXGP operates on a prototype philosophy while the AMA has stricter regs for production-based machinery. Fuel types and therefore scrutineering are other differences. 'I think anything is possible but I hope it will be a standalone weekend for MXGP,' says the FIM's Skillington. 'I'm not fond of a race-within-a-race; if you are riding the World Championship then it should be World Championship rules. If you run in the Outdoor series then you go by their rules.'

The adage of two-heads-are-better-than-one in tackling a problem seems particularly applicable to one of the most anticipated Grands Prix on the calendar. MXGP relies on staple relationships and agreements that in several cases run years and even decades with some clubs and circuits. With MX Sports at the tiller of the re-bolstered ship for the Newfoundland then the FIM World Championship could really be set for a memorable and long-lasting quest.



Davey Coombs talks on the changing picture for motocross race promotion

How do you feel about the landscape for event promotion these days? Does it get a little tougher each year or do you need to be more adventurous?

I think a combination of both. I think all sports have this existential threat, which is the devices we are talking on right now. A coffee shop used to be a place where people went and talked, now everyone goes into their own little world online and with some headphones. In my neighbourhood the place where the kids play it outside my house because we collectively push our kids out of the door: go play! If you asked a kid what they'd prefer an iPhone or a mini bike I think the answer might not be the best one for us motocross fans. Your iPhone is everything seemingly. We now have this generation that would seem more interested in what they find on their



phone compared to their dirtbike and that is a tough proposition. We are in the middle of this generational shift where we are firmly in this social media and digital communications world and until we work out how to master that both as parents and as people then we will have a tough time gathering anyone together for anything whether it is football, baseball or a motocross race. I don't really know the answer but we have more followers on social media than we do coming to the races. It is a tough question because I think we see all over the world that people don't seem to have the free time to do things anymore, or maybe the appetite is not there because they are always doing something connected to their phone.

People must have been busy twenty-three years ago as well...

Yeah but then there wasn't 500 channels on TV or 10,000 websites to visit or you were not constantly walking around texting your buddies or snapchatting or posting or whatever. It is kinda scary and I don't know how or when we will wean ourselves from that but it is a challenge to persuade people to spend a weekend outdoors at a motocross race when they don't have the comforts of home and whether you are Youthstream, MX Sports or MotoGP then I think you are seeing some of that right now. It is most obvious now in NASCAR where it used to be an accelerating mass of figures in the mainstream and then all of a sudden this generation doesn't really like car racing. Their demographic has become older and the venues have started to shrink. It is dire times if you are a stock car fan in America. I know F1 is trying to make some changes and have the same problems but there is

oversaturation on one hand and a lack of interest in the other and it is really hurting car racing. And because nobody has really worked out the problem and the answer it shows how big it is and how a generation can turn its back. Baseball kinda went through that in the 90s and they shrunk the stadiums, went for more of a boutique kinda feel, upped the concessions and snacks and went into building that three hour game into two and a half with lots of bells and whistles. It is hard to do that at Highpoint raceway or St Jean D'Angely but you do the best you can and hope you have good racing and that you'll grow out of it.



David Luongo has added a different perspective to Youthstream's operations and work with MXGP. Now half a decade as part of the sport in a professional capacity he brings something of a unique approach to the role. We found out more...

You moved into sport as a Pro athlete but was motocross in the background...?

Motocross was always in the background. I got my first bike when I was three – '91 in Monaco and my Dad was doing the Masters. He offered me a Honda PW and it was my first souvenir and something to ride while we were building the track. I grew up a bit far from him for ten years when I was in France but I was always going to the GPs so I have good memories of the Everts time and I was a big fan. When I became a footballer I was in Monaco then everything clashed, so for eight-nine years I was a bit far from the sport but kept reading about it and watching the GPs. I rediscovered this championship five years ago.

What about your career as a footballer because you must have learned a lot about what happens behind the scenes in a sport – especially a high-profile one like football – when it comes to contracts, contacts, politics...

Sure. I had contracts, so I had to be careful what I was signing. In football the contracts are long with a lot of clauses, so you cannot do things like ski, ride bicycles, ride motocross! There are many points to study. Generally you are not really 'into' the business side of football but you feel it because it is the biggest sport in the world and it seems like there is a business aspect for every single part. I was really focussed on the game but you see some things and get ideas for areas like TV, VIP and how a stadium is used and how supporters can have a good experience. You understand it slowly because the main target is to play.

Quite a few ex-sportsmen move into promotion, agent, advisory roles. Do you think you're afforded a valuable insight?

I think so...because I think sport in general is the best 'school'. You cannot 'cheat'. In team sports you might be able to hide for a little while

but not for long because the group 'see' you. The spectator might not, because you can be smart, but the players will and they'll put you aside. Sport at a high level is the best school of life because you know how to handle pressure and you have a weekly target: every week you win or lose and then you start from zero on Monday. You have to ask yourself every time if you did a good thing, made a good choice. It is a discipline and maybe you don't know the technique of the job but you know the principles. In sport you also need to be wise, serious, professional to gain some success. When you get to this level of MXGP then the riders need to be on top of every single aspect of their lives. When you see Tim Gajser then he is a machine: there are no surprises. When you work hard then you can make the right choices.

Should your football career have lasted longer?

Yeah, it was a big injury while I was in Scotland that caused me to stop five-six years too early. I stopped in 2012. It was my life and I was young but my body was destroyed.

How did you find the next direction? Was MXGP something you were looking at?

I had been thinking about it for a long time. When I chose football I was fourteen years



old and I was spending half of my [leisure] time with a ball and half with a motocross bike. I was not racing but I was playing with the bike. So it was in my blood and it is exciting to be in this world. So it was always in my mind that if we were still in the business and I could help or bring some ideas and do something with my dad then it would be a big pleasure. Football then came first but I would have loved to be in the motocross industry.

Was there much you could bring across from your football experience?

Yes, quite a lot. This is the fifth year I'm here and I try to bring a better image and level of presentation. There are some small details that we have added over the last five years that perhaps you cannot see so much but overall they are items created so the spectator can have a nice experience. To appreciate the colours, cleanliness, branding

and other aspects; it means looking at the small parts as well as the bigger picture. We made a big turn with social media and five years ago we didn't have much at all. It is so important and our sport connects with young people – this is clear – because when you are a kid you get on the bicycle, maybe on the dirt and then a dirt bike if possible. We have more than 1.5 million fans on Facebook now and we have a direct contact with them,



people as far away as Indonesia, and a way to speak to them like never before. I don't mean just about riders but also our project and this is a good step for us.

How did you find the industry here when it came to deals, negotiating?

The beauty of this sport is the link between the amateur to the professional and it was something I also saw in football. If you go to cars

then the top level is F1 and quite removed from everything else. There is humanity in this sport and perhaps you don't see that in some other motorsports now. You have a complete picture in this paddock: from the top level factory operations like KTM and HRC to supported teams and other stories and projects around us. We are a family company so it is important to have the feeling of both sides.

Football is like a valuable currency: if you work in the sport then everybody knows what it is and what it's about. MXGP is a contrast. It is a niche motorsport that requires more explanation. Did you experience that variance?

Very clearly...and it was part of my aim and ambition to make a brand like MXGP become better known and I think we are in the good way for that; to try and show this is the best series for motocross

around the world. 'MXGP' is a name that needs to be repeated and repeated and advertised. Motocross has a much smaller aspect [than football] but when I explain it to people I like seeing their reaction. There is a curiosity to come, and then when they visit most want to come back! Sometimes I think people are looking for an extreme sport because life can be 'flat' in many ways and there are restrictions to do many things. I think an extreme sport can be like oxygen. I think we are becoming more fashionable than before because we represent a 'freedom' to do something.

For the first one or two years in MXGP did you spend the time observing and analysing?

Yes and I'm not the kind of person to arrive and say 'we have to change everything' and 'this is shit...'. That wasn't the case. This championship has a lot of value and a good dynamic. There are a lot of riders. We don't need a revolution. I was arriving in a 'new world' that I hadn't really seen for some years, so to know what I was really talking about I had to learn: the people, their wishes and their reactions. So it was an educational time rather than one to make decisions.

How is the personal investment? There is a lot of travelling involved and football was already time away...

It is a dream life. I think we have the chance to do what we like and with people we like. For me it is just a pleasure. For sure when you are sixty then you are tired...but when you do what you like then you don't have the right to complain. I love my job and travelling is tiring but there are much more tiring jobs.

Your father is very wrapped-up in this sport – he has become synonymous with Grand Prix and all the twists and turns and stories. How was it for you to come into that? And have people judging you?

I had some of this when I was ten years old; when you know your Dad is a good man and he is doing things for a lot of people and you read some stupid stuff: it hurts. I have to say that football helped me a lot because you have half of the stadium screaming at you and half that loves you. So I learned not to listen to things and not care what the critics think. I do know that he gave his life to this sport. He could have stopped many years ago because he didn't really need it, but we love it and we've developed it a lot. So for me it was about 'how can we continue on this line?' not to worry about what people think.

What about the actual work?

We are always open to discussion and there wasn't really any indication as to who does what and we don't direct people to one person or the other. Some come to see me, some to see him. When we talk about strategy between us then we say everything. The common goal is that we want MXGP to be big and to grow and we don't put our ego in front of any deals.





DEFEND YOUR VISION

PROSPECT

NO SHORTCUTS

40 years of Goggle research and design have all led to the introduction of our newest and most advanced MX goggle to date. The SCOTT PROSPECT offers a Massive field of vision, 50mm Works Film Systems and our proprietary Lens Lock System, giving you the ability to focus on what matters.





► PAULS JONASS



MX

GRAND PRIX OF LATVIA

KEGUMS · MAY 7th · Rnd 7 of 19

MXGP winner: Jeffrey Herlings, KTM

MX2 winner: Thomas Kjer Olsen, Husqvarna



By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

FINALLY PINNED!

MXGP LATVIA



Latvia was notable for the re-emergence of a star and the establishment of a new one. The seventh round of nineteen in MXGP weaned the Grand Prix riders away from the Dutch sand and the horrid bumps, patchy soft soil and slick and edgy hard base of Kegums was an intermediate offering before races eight and nine on the calendar across two old-school hard-pack courses in Germany and France. The loose texture of the Latvian course was enough incentive for Red Bull KTM's Jeffrey Herlings to match two decent starts (finally) to increased confidence and feeling on the works 450 SX-F and blast to his first victory of 2017 and in the premier class. MX2 almost belonged to the protagonist of the weekend and the current standings leader – Pauls Jonass – but Rockstar Energy Husqvarna's Thomas Kjer Olsen was proficient with a 1-2 to spoil the Latvian's homecoming.

The perilous nature of the track that churned into something that demanded respect and punished bravado caught out some of the best: Tim Gajser suffering his worst weekend so far in MXGP with a 14-DNF, Shaun Simpson breaking his left hand after hitting a trackside tower and underwent surgery on Monday afternoon, Arnaud Tonus stretchered away in a neck brace but thankfully in the clear and riders like Seva Brylyakov who attempted to ride with a physical complaint (a shoulder injury) but found the conditions too harsh to negotiate. Others exercised caution – European GP victor Gautier Paulin riding to a safe 7-7, while Monster Energy Kawasaki's Clement Desalle was close to a podium finish but tied on points and lost to the second moto ranking with Evgeny Bobryshev. Some ran the gauntlet and Suzuki's Arminas Jasikonis caught the eye, and the returning Rockstar Energy Husqvarna IceOne's Max Anstie slotted into sixth place after recovering from ankle injury.



Herlings was the class apart. The Dutchman was visibly relieved after his first moto victory and what had been a turgid start to his MXGP debut term blighted by a broken hand and failing confidence. Valkenswaard and round six two weeks ago helped reverse the shallow trajectory and this overdue form of the #84 was something wholly familiar from his MX2 days. The twenty-two year old is in an unusual position.





Six years of dominance (and moments of depression) in MX2 coupled with the pressure of needing to be the third rookie world champion in MXGP (equalling Romain Febvre and Tim Gajser; riders he soundly beat in MX2) created a tight window of operation. Herlings seems to be learning to live with his lot and several months where the freak absence of results – compared to almost his entire Grand Prix career to-date – caused some soul-searching and periods of intense work within the capable KTM crew.

In truth Jeffrey needed this 'shot' before the trips to Teutschenthal and Ernee, that could see him leaning a little further towards

the backfoot against arguably more accomplished hard-pack experts. His Latvian achievements did juice up the premier class though and with Tony Cairoli claiming second place and the red plate for the second time in 2017 the championship is starting to weave a little more.

Olsen's silverware had already been on order. The EMX250 European Champion is evidence that the feeder class can shoot talent straight into the leading pack of the Grand Prix category and weeks and months of top five speed finally delivered spoils; the Dane making his rostrum debut with victory and the first from his country since



Olsen flies high in MX2 while Simpson ponders a broken left hand and an operation that would need a plate, two pins and five screws to fix a snapped metacarpal



MXGP LATVIA

Brian Jorgensen dominated Teutschenthal – scene of round eight in two weeks – back in 2004. Calvin Vlaanderen also graced the box behind Jonass who has pulled out a slightly longer advantage in the points table after Suzuki's Jeremy Seewer hit the dirt and retired with a broken subframe in the second moto.









MXGP LATVIA

Disastrous second MX2 moto for Jeremy Seewer delivered a first DNF of the season and puts the Swiss level with Pauls Jonass for the 'O's column. The Latvian has almost a lead of a Grand Prix in the standings but some good tracks lie ahead for #91



As OTOR heads online Tim Gajser was thankfully given the all-clear by doctors on his arrival home in Slovenia after the heavy crash that prompted only his second non-score in MXGP. The world champion is likely to be less than 100% for the German Grand Prix after the heavy hit to the torso at Kegums and repercussions of the internal bashing



MXGP LATVIA





GOLDENHOFF



CAIROLI

ANSR

17.5 SINCRON

GROUND BEHIND THE HYPE...

Flicking through the latest official MXGP magazine you can understand or relate to Youthstream President Giuseppe Luongo's enthusiasm and excitement for the current state of the series. I always check out at the Italian's monthly foreword; occasionally he'll use the column to drop some interesting nuggets of news on the development or future direction of the championship.

More often than not the pages contain (again comprehendingly from a promotional perspective) hyperbole on MXGP and the tone of the latest outlay is in keeping with the mood around the premier class at the moment: five different winners with four different brands in the first seven rounds is statistical weight to both the openness and the tight level of competition in MXGP, that perhaps has the deepest pool of pedigree and proven talent in the modern era of Grand Prix.

A third of the way through the calendar and we are already nearing the total of seven victors from 2016 and 2015 and level with the five from 2014. The sad fact is that attrition is bound to start appearing at some point. Seven events are in the books but there are still twelve fixtures and twenty-four motos to run. Athletes like Kevin Strijbos, Max Anstie and Jordi Tixier (and

now Shaun Simpson) have already graced the doctor's scalpel and the odds decree that they won't be the last. As Red Bull KTM's Jeffrey Herlings commented after the races at Valkenswaard in Holland recently he was 'surprised' at just how much everyone is 'on the limit' in MXGP.

There is a need for this urgency. The metal grid system for the race starts has been an authentic field leveller (literally and figuratively) and those that have not quite deduced their optimum set-up are staring into the distance at podium contention. Close lap-times are cementing the opening circulation of each moto as the most critical moments of the Grand Prix, and even the more technical of surfaces are permitting only incremental differences to the running orders that are compact and relentless. It is testament to the riders' con-

centration, skill and focus at this level that mistakes are largely at a minimum. Athletes like Rockstar Energy IceOne Husqvarna's Max Nagl are struggling to enter the top seven (the German was leading the standings only two seasons ago with five podiums and three wins from the first six rounds) and Wilvo Yamaha's Simpson can triumph in one muddy moto and Grand Prix but then strive for top ten recognition in the rest of the sprints.

Cairolì's charge at Trentino was an exception so far in 2017 and has much to do with the drive of a home Grand Prix and some fairly risky overtaking moves in one of the few valid places on the Pietramurata layout. With good cause the ride was lauded, and it is hard to imagine some kind of repeat this season until the schedule finds some deep sand.

By Adam Wheeler



The best thing about 2017 so far is the narratives that have appeared and the prospect of those still to come.

‘LIKE THE EXPERIENCE OF WATCHING CAIROLI AT ARCO DI TRENTO YOU CAN ONLY HOPE THAT THE VEIN OF UNPREDICTABILITY AROUND MXGP CAN LAST...’

For instance Cairoli's resurrection to master of the realm was something that remained in doubt for some after a powerless 2016 but #222 has already made his mark on the championship story. Gajser's maturation with the new Honda, Simpson's skill in the Indonesian mud, Paulin's comeback to taste champagne with four brands in MXGP and Herlings' 'return' in Latvia have ensured fresh interest and content around Grand Prix. As much as it is admirable to see a rider in full flight and dominating terrain as well as rivals there is nothing better – from a selfish and vocational point of view – than someone else doing something different.

The stories yet to materialise concern the likes of Romain Febvre and Clement Desalle finding or rediscovering new peaks and whether names like Nagl, Van Horebeek and Bobryshev can finally pull themselves up to that higher level of performance and results.

Like the experience of watching Cairoli at Arco di Trento you can only hope that the vein of unpredictability around MXGP can last. It seemed that Gajser was on the verge of a dominant run after Argentina and Mexico but then hit a few snags on the Italian hard-pack and Dutch sand; it almost gave some impetus to the rest of the pack. Confidence and momentum must be some of the most valuable hidden currency in the paddock and it is the fans – from presidents to avid social media followers in the depths of Asia or South America – that benefit when a greater number of riders have that swagger.



the bike shed

Not really a product but a place and event that will contain plenty of desirable items for any bike fan. The Tobacco Dock meet for The Bike Shed on the final weekend in May will apparently be double the size of their previous offerings with 150 invitational custom machines. Kids are free and there is also secured free bike parking and cloakroom. 'TBS' also claim there will be: 'art, live painting, pin-striping, photography, whisky-bar, cigar lounge, tattooists, barbershop, live music, loads of great street food, barista coffee, 6 licensed bars, selected gear & apparel from the biggest and best brands curated by us'. Tickets cost a reasonable 18 pounds with the entry valid for the entire weekend.

www.universe.com/events/bike-shed-london-2017-tickets-MGVR1X



ACERBIS DUTCH ROUND

ASSEN CIRCUIT · APRIL 29-30th

Race one winner: Jonathan Rea, Kawasaki

Race two winner: Jonathan Rea, Kawasaki



TWO TO TANGO

Gallery & Blog by Graeme Brown/GeeBee images



















DARE TO DISPUTE...

So there I was a few weeks ago feeling quite smug that I had accurately assessed the real nature of the rivalry between Jonathan Rea and Chaz Davies. Then it all kicked off. Very publicly. The pair clashed over an on track incident during Superpole which I am sure everyone has watched numerous times now and come up with their own conclusions. In the pressroom it had everyone, and I mean everyone, reporting, pontificating, gossiping, and to those of a certain generation, wondering if either had a blue bathrobe in their motorhome.

I was in pit lane making my way to parc ferme when I saw a little bit of something stirring on the big screen facing the Assen main stand but I wasn't really sure what had happened. There was a bit of an atmosphere whilst the TV interviews took place but inevitably the pair approached each other and that's when the 'effin n jeffin' started.

I am not going to comment either way: I like it up here on my fence. However, it would appear that everyone in paddock thought it was some form of manna from heaven. In the aftermath both took to the digital airwaves and made comment about the incident. JR, via a magazine blog, and Davies, who was clearly not curtailed by a sub-editors

word count, gave a full and frank account via his Facebook page. That, as usual stirred up the fans who steamed in with their comments. The theme from the JR camp seems to be 'it happened, he still won, move on'. On the other hand Chaz still seemed to feel pretty aggrieved. One comment that Davies made which did strike a chord with me was that if Rea did know what he was doing it was a bit of a strange thing to do given his dominance of the season so far.

In some of the social media posts it was suggested that Davies was just showing his insecurities but is it Rea who is preparing for an onslaught from his rivals over the next part of the season? If we look back to 2016 Davies, did the

double in Imola; the next round. Sykes, the double at Donington, the fixture that will come after Imola this year. Rea did take a double win in Misano but then had to give the rest to Davies who closed the season with 7 wins from 10 races. Maybe JR is already on the defensive if he feels this year will be a replica of '16. One thing for sure in the run up to this weekend's round in Imola the Championship as a whole will benefit from the furore as we head to Ducati's back yard. I get the feeling, however, it is going to run all year and we may just get another last race show down to cap the campaign.

On the weekend at Assen, JR's results were all about the stats – 200 starts, 45 race wins, 11 wins

By Graeme Brown



at Assen, 3rd double at Assen... another stat that I found intriguing was the attendance figure, 54,178 for the whole weekend. Not so bad I hear you mutter. However, it was quoted at the Paddock Show that the attendance was 24% up on last year. So that would have been 43,692 for 2016. But hang on a minute last year it was reported as 50,437. So in reality 4000 extra bums on seats this year. Obviously I had misheard.

Nonetheless the attendance at Assen certainly did look to be substantially more than last year. Probably thanks to the rising popularity of local hero Michael Van Der Mark. It is the first time for a long time that I have had to wait in a queue of traffic to enter the circuit on a Sunday morning at 7:45am. Something is working then and long may it continue. The next race at Imola is always a popular one on the calendar. Maybe Saturday's little fracas will rouse the Ducatisti to come out to back Davies and Melandri.

We are now two races in to the new support class, SSP300. So

far ex-Red Bull rookie Scott Deroué has dominated on the Kawasaki Ninja 300 but the competition at the front of the field looks quite intense and the racing, albeit a little slow, in pretty close fought. SSP300 has immediately been promoted to World Championship status and the riders take part in the same format of Superpole as WorldSBK. That is all they do on a Saturday, however. As I stood and photographed the 12 bikes in Superpole 2, ambling their way around the track, I thought that this format doesn't really work for a small capacity class like this. Especially when there are tight restrictions on tuning the machinery.

There is a track cycling series in the UK know as Revolution. Basically a glamourized Saturday evening of stage-managed professional track racing that visits the various Velodromes around the country in the winter months. In between the pro races they have a Future Stars series, designed for under 16 racers, who are on track for short sharp races in every gap in the professional programme – 6 lap dash, 12 lap

points race (sprint lap every four and points awarded for top three), another 6 lap dash and so on for four or five races.

Wouldn't it be an idea to adopt a similar format for SSP300? One 30 minute practice session on Friday morning, a qualifying race in the afternoon and then 3 short races interspersed throughout the day on Saturday and Sunday. 'Feeder' series like this are supposed to be about developing racing talent, providing an inexpensive race series and adding entertainment to the programme. What better way to satisfy all three of those criteria than to have these young riders racing all the time instead of lapping a big circuit on their own for 15-20 minutes, chasing a lap time as the only thing they do for a whole day? If my kid is anything to go by, when he goes to the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome in Glasgow he hates training, practicing starts and "all that rubbish", he just wants to race all the time. Lets give our budding WorldSBK stars the same chance.

worldsbk/acerbis

www.worldsbk.com

A conservative but appealing link-up for WorldSBK with the renowned Acerbis brand producing a small portfolio of officially licenced products. Three riding jackets – the Highlander, Broadway, St John and Santa Monica for ladies all with varying degrees of enforcements, protection and panelling, the Broadway is perhaps the more casual of the crop – are complemented by gloves, technical under layers and accessories like a bike cover and mats. No firm details on pricing but the products as well as a full line-up of casualwear can be found on the WorldSBK website.







BACK PAGE

Photo by GeeBee images





'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focussed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP.

'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

Adam Wheeler Editor and MXGP/MotoGP correspondent

Ray Archer Photographer

Steve Matthes AMA MX and SX correspondent

Cormac Ryan-Meenan MotoGP Photographer www.cormacgp.com

Simon Cudby AMA SX/MX Photographer

Matthew Roberts Television Presenter and WSB correspondent

Gavin Emmett TV commentator/Presenter and MotoGP Reporter

David Emmett MotoGP Blogger

Neil Morrison MotoGP Blogger

Graeme Brown WSB Blogger and Photographer

Roland Brown Tester

Núria Garcia Cover Design

Rosa Baldrich 2017 re-design

Gabi Álvarez Web developer

Hosting FireThumb7 - www.firethumb7.co.uk

Thanks to www.mototribu.com

PHOTO CREDITS

Ray Archer, CormacGP, Simon Cudby/Rich Shepherd, GeeBee Images

Cover shot: Zach Osborne by Cudby/Shepherd

This publication took a lot of time and effort to put together so please respect it! Nothing in this publication can be reproduced in whole or part without the written permission of the editorial team. For more information please visit www.ontrackoffroad.com and click 'Contact us'.